

Meeting Notes  
Tenant Work Group  
Tuesday, November 25, 2008  
6:30-8:30pm  
Executive Conference Room  
101 Monroe Street  
Rockville, MD 20850

Work Group Members in attendance:

Matt Losak (Chair), Chuck Short, Maureen Ross, Zack Fried, Rick Nelson, Felicia Eberling, Dale Tibbitts

Staff participants:

Patrice Cheatham, DHCA

Agenda

- Call to Order
- Welcome and introduction of new members
- Quick review of minutes
- Overview of work proposals
- Work decisions

Break

All Group Work: What, How, Who, When?

- Public Meetings
- Tenant Surveys
- Rent Control/Stabilization
- Review of Code
- Enforcement processes
- State Law Review
- Best Practices Review
- Website/Public Information
- Product Meeting (report, look, process)

Notes:

Matt Losak called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. There were no new group members or guests. Chuck reported that the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center which previously expressed an interest will be sending a representative. A suggestion was made that no new members be added after January 1 but that Matt will respond to those who have shown an interest.

Previous meeting's minutes were approved. No comments.

There was discussion on responses to work proposals. The group agreed that work reports and updates be shared with the TWG as a whole to allow for full consideration and cross-monitoring of task progress.

The TWG agreed to focus the group's attention on 4 primary committees consisting on the bulk of the work before the TWG. The TWG agreed to the necessity of streamlining and prioritizing work and also agreed to table additional work for future consideration by the TWG and/or other potential tenant advocacy structures envisioned by the TWG.

In response to the previous assignment, Chuck suggested establishment of 4 committees. Maureen suggested a 5<sup>th</sup> committee to address Seniors and Special Needs.

Rick grouped the individual areas of concern into categories. The group considered each category and assigned tasks to each committee as follows:

**Committee 1 - Tenant Security and Affordability** - this committee will study issues that contribute to a sense of tenant instability and make recommendations to address them. They will also research best practices around the nation which contribute to affordability in rental housing.

Categories to be addressed by this committee:

**Renter Protection:**

- No protections for renters living in foreclosed homes
- No-fault evictions
- No sense of security
- Retaliatory evictions
- Harassment
- Landlords wanting to sell and not notifying renters
- Eviction and use of courts

**Rental Costs:**

- Rent increases
- Extra fees for month-to-month leases
- High cost of utilities
- How utilities are divided
- Energy conservation
- Cost of cable
- Cable regulation and choice
- Security deposits

**Regulatory Issues:**

- Condo Conversions

**Other**

- Lack of affordable housing and reductions in government programs
- Economic viability of owning rental units
- Pathways to ownership

**Committee 2 - Code Update and Enforcement** - this committee will review current State and County Code (occupancy, building and landlord/tenant) for relevancy and make recommendations for amendments as needed. They will also review code enforcement practices and make recommendations for improvements if needed.

Categories to be addressed by this committee:

### **Regulatory Issues:**

- Code enforcement
- Conflict resolution - mediation between landlords and tenants
- Safety
- Lack of codified tenant rights
- Local, state, federal laws
- Absentee landlords
- Parking
- HOC allocations
- Discrimination
- Condo conversions
- Occupancy standards

**Committee 3 - Landlord-Tenant Communication and Ongoing Tenant Advocacy** - this committee will consider best practices for landlord tenant engagement in mutually beneficial and respectful discussions of issues of mutual interest. They will also research successful models of engagement in the County and other communities. The committee will make recommendations regarding ongoing tenant advocacy structures and landlord tenant communication mechanisms.

Categories to be addressed by this committee:

#### **Communication:**

- Communication between landlords and tenants
- Communication with the County
- Understanding landlord and tenant responsibilities
- Language barriers
- Understanding details of leases
- Cultural sensitivity

#### **Other**

- Challenges to tenants associations and organizing tenants

**Committee 4 - Seniors and Special Needs** - Maureen will suggest the categories to be addressed by this committee and this will be considered next meeting.

**Committee 5 - Outreach and Education - TABLED FOR LATER DISCUSSION**. It was suggested that this committee research existing local tenant information materials and those from other communities and recommend effective public education materials. They may also plan and implement outreach activities to target specific populations to assure that these perspectives are considered as the full work group makes recommendations.

The agreed, however, that the TWG website should be created ASAP; Matt will get input from County's Office of Public Affairs.

#### **All group discussion points:**

- Some issues cross over into more than one committee. These may originally be examined by one committee and be reassigned to another committee as needed.

- Some individuals will need to serve on more than one committee.
- Committees should focus on:
  - a. Clearly identifying their primary issues.
  - b. Find solutions which include research based on best practices.
  - c. Make recommendations or suggestions to resolve the issue.
  - d. Address “low-hanging” fruit first.
- Committees will meet separately and then report back to the larger group. **All committees should be focused and ready to provide a work plan to the larger group by the end of January.** As the committees begin work each will have scheduled time to present their findings to the group. Emails should be used as the committee’s progress in their work so that all members of the work group can stay apprised on work ideas and issues.
- A listing of the group categories will be sent out before the next meeting (contained in these minutes). Each work group member should consider committees to work on. A suggestion was made that group members self nominate for committee chair positions. A second suggestion was made that additional discussion take place at the next meeting on committee chairs and operation of the committees. Decisions on work groups will be made at the next meeting. Matt will consider all nominations and self-nominations, but will make final decision on committee staffing.
- Matt led the discussion on “All Group” topics. The question was raised whether there are issues that the entire group should consider together and gain clear understanding.
- Chuck recommended that staff pull together briefing on State and County Code and Landlord Tenant Code, state law and enforcement practices so that work group members have a baseline understanding. It was suggested that this briefing take place during the first hour of the January meeting.
- Maureen suggested that the issue of rent stabilization be considered within the “Affordability” committee.
- A suggestion was made that the tenant survey take shape early so that input can be included based on data collected. Alice previously volunteered to coordinate development of tenant survey. A suggestion was made that she consider utilizing local universities as a resource.
- A brief discussion took place on the public meetings. Based on the County’s regions the following breakout was proposed:
  1. Silver Spring/Wheaton
  2. East County (Burtonsville, White Oak)
  3. Germantown/ Gaithersburg
  4. Bethesda/Rockville

Chuck suggested that the Senior and Special Needs Committee undertake public outreach to this population and also conduct the public meetings for this group. Chuck said he would work with the committee on undertaking these assignments.

- Zack provided handouts of the State and County Code.
- Chuck said he would provide the recent living standards to everyone; it indicates that a family of 4 need to earn \$77,000/yr in order to live in Montgomery County.

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 9, 6:30 p.m., County Executive's conference room.**